

Submission  
No 582

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

I planned a homebirth for my first child in 2015. I hired a privately practicing midwife who provided all my antenatal care. At 36 days and 6 weeks gestation, I developed pain in my lower abdomen, which my midwife and mother (an emergency nurse) suspected was appendicitis.

We went to the emergency department of [REDACTED] Public Hospital, where staff took one look at my belly and refused to listen to my concerns, they pointed me in the direction of the main hospital entrance and told me to go to birth unit. They must have assumed that I was in labour, but didn't give me the opportunity to explain.

The 100m or so walk to the main entrance was excruciating. I had to stop several times to rest because the pain was intensifying. Later, I learned that there is a lift from the emergency department which goes straight to the floor where birth unit is, so they could have saved me that walk.

My midwife and husband handled the paperwork on arrival, while I tried to get into a position which reduced the pain. We arrived at approximately 10pm. I was taken to a private room, where a CTG monitor was placed on my belly and my midwife checked to see if my cervix was dilated - it wasn't. I was not in labour.

I had hired a private obstetrician as well as a private midwife - this was before midwives had visiting rights to [REDACTED] so having this arrangement would ensure that my midwife would be able to act as my primary care provider in hospital, should we need to go. The hospital midwives knew and seemed to respect my PPM. My midwife called my OB and explained her concerns, he advised to wait for an assessment by a registrar.

It took a long time for anyone to come and assess me. I kept declining pain relief, as I believed it would harm my baby.

Finally, someone came to take a blood and urine test and we had the results not too long afterwards. I had elevated white blood cells, which indicated an infection, but the people assessing me refused to admit that it could be my appendix. No ultrasound was ordered, and my OB kept advising to 'wait and see'.

Between 2 and 3am the pain intensified to unbearable levels. I suspect this is when my appendix ruptured. I consented to morphine, as I couldn't sit still on the bed or even speak due to the pain.

Once the morphine kicked in I was comfortable enough to have a nap. At 8am my OB came in for his daily rounds and advised that I would need to be taken to theatre immediately. It came as a complete shock, after so many hours of waiting for something to happen, not once was

it explained to me that I might require a caesarean section to remove my baby and the appendix. I had less than a minute to process this information and sign the consent form. This was not informed consent, as I did not have sufficient time to ask questions and ensure that I understood the procedure. Later, when I requested a copy of my medical notes, I was shocked to see 'hysterectomy' listed as a potential risk of the surgery. If this was explained to me at the time, I was under too much stress to understand it.

I was rushed into theatre and was told that my husband could not come with me. I was terrified - I truly thought I was going to die. I said goodbye to my husband and my mum - I will never forget the look of fear on her face. My midwife was allowed to come into the room through, and I clung to her hand. I had only met my OB twice during my pregnancy, so I had not developed a relationship with him yet, but my midwife helped me to feel calm. I hyperventilated as they tried to put a mask over my face for the general anaesthetic.

I woke up alone, in a room with beds lining the walls. I could hear and see a blurry outline of some nurses on the far side of the room, but no one was with me. I immediately started pulling the mask off my face and a nurse came to put it back on. "Where is my baby?" I asked her. She told me she did not know, but she would ask. I don't know how much time passed before someone came to take me to the NICU, where my daughter had been taken. I was told that my abdomen was full of pus when they opened me for surgery, and because the baby was so big, they completed the caesarean first. My daughter came into contact with the infection, so they had her on IV antibiotics as a 'precaution'.

She was a perfectly healthy baby, 2.7kg and fully developed. The nurses would not let me hold her, saying that I was still too groggy from the anesthetic. I wished they had help her to my chest so that I could smell her and touch her. I feel robbed of that moment and so many others.

I did not hear my daughter's first cry, I was not the first to hold her, in fact, it was many hours later before I had that opportunity. The first time I saw my daughter's face clearly was in a photo my sister had taken on her phone.

I later found out that the NICU staff had fed my daughter formula without my consent. This was particularly upsetting to me, as breastfeeding felt like the only thing I had left within my control. My daughter's birth was the complete opposite of what I wanted, and now I had to battle with possessive NICU nurses who would argue with me over how long I was "allowed" to hold my baby for.

I remember one particular incident with a NICU nurse. I had been taken down to NICU in a wheelchair by a porter to feed my daughter. NICU is on a completely separate floor to the maternity ward, which is just ridiculously poor planning. I couldn't walk that distance on my

own, so depended on having a visitor (during hours) or a staff member available to take me down.

When I arrived and began holding my daughter, a NICU nurse came over to tell me they wanted to give her a nasal feeding tube. I told her that I felt this was completely unnecessary, as my daughter was breastfeeding well and taking the bottles of expressed milk I was providing. She stood over me with her hands on her hips and said "well I'M her nurse, and I'M responsible for her care!". It took every ounce of courage for me to stand up to her. I was in a wheelchair, extremely vulnerable and feeling emotionally and physically wrecked.

This kind of abuse continued in the maternity ward. When my daughter was finally brought up to my room, I worked very hard to establish my milk supply with regular expressing. One night, a group of midwives came into my room at changeover time. They never used my name, and spoke about me as though I wasn't even in the room. I was holding my baby and had a bottle of milk I had expressed next to me. One midwife looked at it and said "is THAT all you've got?". She then began to pressure me into feeding my daughter formula and threatened to send her back to the NICU if I didn't. I finally caved in and I cried the entire time I fed my daughter that bottle. I vividly remember the smell of the Milton they disinfect the bottles with.

I had midwives start expressing my breasts without asking for my permission, I had multiple NICU nurses tell me I couldn't hold my daughter for more than 15 minutes at a time. I could not wait to leave that hospital and just be in the peace of my own home.

My experience at [REDACTED] was truly traumatising. I sought the help of a perinatal psychologist after her birth, which helped me a lot. I continued to see her through my subsequent ectopic pregnancy 16 months later, which an obstetrician told me was likely caused from the pressure of my appendix rupturing, which damaged one of my fallopian tubes. I felt a lot of anger and believed that this was happening because staff in hospital didn't act quickly enough and weren't willing to consider the possibility that my appendix was infected.

I began a complaint with the HCCC, but pulled out when they wanted me to go back to the hospital for a meeting.

While I was grateful for the surgery which kept me and my daughter alive, I was simultaneously traumatised and grieved for the birth experience I had wished for. This was not just a case of expectations not being met - almost all of my trauma could have been prevented if I'd been treated with respect.